

An Explanation of the Hail Mary



by Father Ferreol Girardey, C.Ss.R.

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Preface

The object of this little work is to promote devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Mother of God, by giving special prominence to her Divine Maternity and to the fact that it was God Himself who gave us the example to honor her, and thence to the conclusion that all the honor, love and confidence we bestow upon her is entirely in accordance with the will and example of God Himself and is, moreover, the fulfillment of her own prophecy that "henceforth all generations shall call me blessed" (Luke 1:48). All this is found in the explanation of the Hail Mary, the best and most beautiful of prayers after the Lord's Prayer.

Origin of the Hail Mary

Next to the Our Father, which our Lord Jesus Christ Himself taught us, the Hail Mary is the best, the most beautiful and efficacious of prayers. It has also a divine origin, for each of its three parts has been taught by God Himself. The first part, "Hail (Mary), full of grace, the Lord is with thee, blessed art thou among women," was the greeting which the angel Gabriel, God's special messenger to the virgin Mary, addressed to her (Luke 1:27,28). The second part, "Blessed art thou among women and blessed is the fruit of thy womb (Jesus)" (5:41,42), was the reply Saint Elizabeth, filled with the Holy Ghost," made to Mary's greeting. And the Catholic Church, "the Church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth" (1 Timothy 3:15), founded by Jesus Christ and guided by the Holy Ghost, "the Spirit of truth" (John 15:26), has added the third part, "Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us, sinners, now and at the hour of our death. Amen."

Therefore, when we recite the Hail Mary, we salute, venerate and exalt Mary as “the Mother of God” (Luke 1:43) with the very words which God Himself addressed to her through the angel Gabriel, His faithful ambassador, for the accomplishment of the mystery of the Incarnation of His divine Son; we congratulate Mary in the words the Holy Ghost inspired Saint Elizabeth to utter, for being exalted above all creatures as the Mother of Him who “is called the Son of the Most High” (Luke 1:32). Then with the infallible Church of the Son of God, we invoke and beseech Mary, His divinely chosen Mother, to help us, to “pray for us,” weak and frail and sinful mortals, both in life and at the hour of our death, that we, too, may be admitted to see, praise and love her divine Son and her forever in heaven.

The Annunciation

(Luke 1:20-38)

“At that time the angel Gabriel was sent from God into a city of Galilee, called Nazareth, to a virgin espoused to a man, whose name was Joseph, of the house of David; and the virgin’s name was Mary.”

“At that time,” that is, six months after the same angel Gabriel had appeared in the temple of Jerusalem to the priest Zachary, to announce to him that, in his old age, a son would be born to him, whom he should call John, and who was to be the precursor in Israel of the promised Saviour. The time when God sent the angel Gabriel to the virgin Mary is designated by Saint Paul as “the fullness of time,” that is, when “the seventy weeks of years” which were to precede the death of the promised Redeemer for the salvation of mankind, would in no very distant future be completed (Dan. 9. 24). When God sent the angel Gabriel to Mary, Herod, the Idumean, who had wrested and usurped the

scepter of Juda from the house of David, was nearing the end of his despotic and cruel reign, and the second temple of Jerusalem, which the prophet Aggeus had foretold (2:8) "the Desired of all nations would fill with glory," in which were preserved the Jewish genealogies, was still standing in all its splendor.

It was "at that time the angel Gabriel was sent from God into a city of Galilee called Nazareth." Gabriel, whose name signifies "strength of God," is sent to announce a great mystery, to make a wonderful revelation, which concerned the eternal welfare of the whole human race. He was sent by God Himself to Nazareth, a poor, obscure town, which had previously never produced anything worthy of record.

The angel Gabriel was sent by God Himself "to a virgin espoused to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David, and the virgin's name was Mary." Although of royal lineage, Mary was but an obscure virgin inhabiting a poor dwelling with her newly espoused husband, Joseph, "a just man" (Matthew 1:19), but poor in this world's goods. The prophet Isaias had, centuries before, clearly foretold that "a virgin shall conceive and bring forth "the expected Redeemer, "God with us" (Isaiah 7:14). Another prophecy stated that the Messias was to be of the house, or family, of David. The words of Isaias clearly and unmistakably indicate the Redeemer's miraculous conception and birth and also His divinity, for he says: "A virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and His name shall be called Emmanuel," which name means "God with us" and indicates plainly the divinity of the "Son" whom the "virgin" was to "conceive and bear." Mary of Nazareth was the "virgin" chosen by God for this wonderful mystery. Her marriage to the "just man Joseph" preserved her from suspicion and enabled the promised Redeemer, the very Son of God, to enter the world apparently in the ordinary way, as the fruit of a lawful and honorable

marriage. The mystery of the Incarnation of the Son of God could not have been made public prior to His resurrection and the foundation of His Church, without either requiring such stupendous miracles as would deprive faith of all merit and practically frustrate the Redeemer's passion and death, or causing so frightful a scandal as would necessarily ruin beforehand the good name of Jesus Christ and His Church. God, in His infinite wisdom, had decreed that His Son should come on earth without attracting any more notice than was required to legalize, in accordance with the prophecies, the fact of his ancestral lineage and of His birth at the time and place foretold centuries previously. Saint Justin, philosopher and martyr, towards the middle of the second century, and Tertullian, the celebrated Christian writer about the end of the same century or the beginning of the third, attest in their writings that they had seen and examined in the archives kept in the Capitol in Rome, the Census Lists made under Cyrius or Quirinus, governor of Syria (Luke 2:14), and had found therein the record of the birth and lineage of Jesus Christ, together with the place of His birth.

God had, moreover, decreed that His divine Son should remain in obscurity on earth until the time appointed for beginning His public ministry among men. Therefore He appointed Saint Joseph to be Mary's protector, helper, provider, friend and companion, and the Redeemer's worthy foster-father, and to support Him and His Virgin-Mother by his labor. Mary, who is rightly compared to the dawn of the day, like the dawn which derives its light from the day it announces, derives all her holiness, her perfection and her superiority over all creatures, from Jesus Christ, her divine Son.

"The angel, having come in, said unto her: HAIL, FULL OF GRACE, the Lord is with thee; blessed art thou among women." Mary, most probably, was then alone engaged in

prayer and meditation, when the angel entered bowing and saluting her in so remarkable a manner, and this, too, in the name of God Himself, whose messenger he was. We cannot find in all Scripture an example of a messenger of God saluting any other person than the Virgin Mary, whom the angel Gabriel greeted with such great reverence and praise. In fact, the angel greets Mary as one superior to himself. He calls her "full of grace." Grace is a supernatural gift, which we cannot of ourselves merit, but which God, in His goodness, imparts to man, to elevate his nature, to sanctify him, and to enable him to perform what is above his nature and powers and thus merit eternal happiness in heaven. The least degree of divine grace is worth more than the whole universe. It is, as it were, an infused supernatural, heavenly life; it makes us holy and pleasing to God, children of God and fits us to gain merit for heaven by our actions. And the angel declares to Mary that she is "full of grace." How holy and pleasing to God must she have been already then! Having been destined from all eternity to be the Mother of the Messias, the Son of God, our divine Saviour, the very Author of grace, the Virgin Mary was so endowed by God as to be more pleasing to God than any other creature from the very first moment of her existence. It was, indeed, not only most becoming, but also necessary that the Mother of the Son of God, to be His worthy Mother, in the sight of God, of the angels and of men, should, from her very conception, have been immaculate and so enriched with a fullness of grace, of divine gifts, as to deserve the title given her by the Church of "Mother of divine grace." Wherefore we must hold with the Church that not only Mary's dignity as the Mother of the Son of God but also the very honor of the Son of God Himself required that Mary from her very conception should have been immaculate and super-eminently holy and pleasing to God, and never after have been stained with the slightest sin; hence she was also confirmed in grace. Mary was, indeed, full of grace at the very first moment of her

existence, and she ever after remained faithful to grace, and by co-operating with divine grace constantly, her capacity for grace constantly increased from day to day, so that she ever remained “full of grace.” When God’s messenger came to her and greeted her as “full of grace,” she had already acquired so sublime a degree of holiness as to be, as far as is possible to a creature, worthy of becoming the Mother of the Son of God, of the Saviour of mankind. The angel, in the name of God Himself, praised her not for her corporeal beauty or her natural eminent qualities, or her royal lineage, but for her supernatural gifts and her correspondence therewith.

“The Lord is With Thee.”

This is not a wish, but an express declaration. From all eternity the Almighty had chosen her as the instrument to bring about the Redemption of fallen man through the Incarnation and birth of the Son of God. God, although the purest Spirit, by His immensity is in all beings, in all creatures, in all men; but He is with those only who are in the state of grace. God was with Mary from the first moment of her existence; he had so greatly sanctified her, that He always dwelt in her by His grace. On the day the angel greeted her as having “the Lord with her,” God dwelt in her still more intimately and became her true Son, for then the prophecy was literally fulfilled that “a virgin shall conceive God with us,” and the “Son of God” began to dwell in her personally and became truly “her Son.”

“Blessed Art Thou Among Women.”

Mary was, indeed, blessed above all women on account of the heavenly favors God bestowed on her, her super-eminent virtues and sanctity, and God’s choice of her as the mother of Him “who shall be called” and be truly “the Son of

God" and the Saviour of mankind. The beginning of the curse of sin in man was from Eve, a woman, wherefore woman was thenceforth considered and treated in the world as an inferior being and as man's slave. But it was Mary, a woman, that was the beginning of the blessing restored to man and the means of raising woman above herself, not only by restoring her to the rank God had given her at creation as man's helpmate and companion, but also by raising her as a source of blessing to mankind by a life of virginity, of devotedness, and sacrifice for mankind's spiritual and temporal welfare. Mary is blessed above all women, for in her all women, whether married, widows or virgins, find a perfect model in the virtues of their state.

"Mary, having heard, was troubled at the angel's words, and thought within herself what manner of salutation this was." Mary, already the holiest of creatures, was also the most humble, and felt, therefore, worried and troubled at the wonderful praise so reverentially bestowed upon her by the angel. How different was her conduct from that of Eve. Eve, when she heard the serpent saying to her: "You shall be as gods" (Genesis 3:4), was filled with the ambition of being greater than she was, of being "as a god." She was light-minded and proud, and consequently fell into the trap Satan had set for her, and thus brought sin and its curse into the world. But Mary was both humble and prudent, and believed herself unworthy of such great praise, and feared lest like Eve she also might be led astray by undeserved praise. How different was Mary's conduct from ours. We are fond of praise and desire and seek it and are puffed up by even the most undeserved praise, and are crest-fallen at being unnoticed and not receiving the praise we consider as our due. The angel saw her trouble and undertook to re-assure her.

“And the angel said to her: Fear not, Mary, for thou hast found grace with God.” By the sin of our first parents and also by their own sins all men had lost the grace of God and forfeited His friendship. And now Mary, by God’s special favor towards her as the destined Mother of the Redeemer, and also by her prayers and yearning for His coming, had found the lost grace and divine friendship, not only for herself as the chosen Mother of the Redeemer, but also for all mankind.

“Behold thou shalt conceive in thy womb and shalt bring forth a Son, and thou shalt call His name Jesus. He shall be great and shall be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God shall give unto Him the throne of David, His father, and He shall reign in the house of Jacob forever; and of His kingdom there shall be no end.” These were joyful tidings, indeed, that the time had now come when the prophecies concerning the coming of the Messias were about to be fulfilled. These prophecies regarded chiefly His conception by and birth from a virgin, His descent from David; for David and his reign were considered as figures of the Messias and His reign over the descendants of Abraham according to the spirit. Saint Paul (Romans 9:7) makes an essential distinction between Isaac, the son of Abraham according to the divine promise, that is, according to the spirit, and Ismael his son according to the flesh, and the son of bondage. Hence Saint Paul considers as true children of Abraham only those that are so according to the spirit. Hence the words of the angel concerning the eternal reign of the Messias in the house of Jacob did not refer to the natural descendants of Jacob, but to those according to the spirit, that is, all who would faithfully accept and live up to the teachings of the Messias, that is, to the Church of Christ and her members. “Of the reign of the Saviour in His Church there shall be no end,” says the Nicene Creed. By the words of His angel messenger God offered to Mary the most

exalted dignity and the greatest honor in His power, the maternity of His divine Son, the Messias, the Saviour of the world, an honor, a dignity then desired and hoped for by every woman in Israel. Nevertheless, the humble Virgin was not dazzled by the offer, for "Mary said to the angel: How shall this be done? because I know not man." Let us here admire Mary's tender love of virginity and her admirable humility. When she heard the wonderful salutation and praise of the angel, she was disturbed and as if bewildered at the praise she neither sought nor desired, and she was silent. But when she thought her virginity, which she had vowed to God, was at stake, she at once spoke out and objected her virginity to the offer the angel made her, for she was prepared to refuse the proffered sublime dignity, rather than forfeit her virginity so dear to her heart. How different was Mary from so many Christians who so easily and willingly barter their souls, their eternity for a trifle, a little worldly honor and distinction, pleasure, wealth, or a desirable marriage! Here Mary shows herself as the Virgin of virgins, as the worthy Queen of virgins. At the same time she is far from doubting or refusing to believe what the angel said to her about the greatness of the Messias and His eternal kingdom. How different is she in this from Zachary, who asked the angel for a sign as a proof of the truth of his promise! Mary always showed her self a model of holy simplicity and faith.

"And the angel answering said to her: The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Most High shall overshadow thee; and therefore also the Holy One that shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God." On this occasion the ineffable mystery of the Blessed Trinity, of one God in three distinct divine Persons, is revealed for the first time. The angel mentions: the Holy Ghost coming down upon Mary, the power of the Most High, the Father, overshadowing her, and the Son of God, to be conceived in

her womb as her Son and become man. The Holy Ghost, who is the mutual Love of the Father and the Son, is the medium of the Incarnation of the Son of God, this sublime work of divine love and grace. Through Him all holiness and the childship of God come to us. The almighty power of God the Father will work the miracle of the Incarnation. Mary's inviolate virginity was prefigured, first by the burning bush seen by Moses (Exodus 3:2), which burned with out being consumed; Mary became a mother and her virginity remained inviolate; secondly, by the fleece of Gideon, which remained dry, while every thing around it was covered with a heavy dew; Mary's motherhood respected her virginity; again, the fleece alone was wet with dew, when all its surroundings remained perfectly dry (Judges 6:37-40); Mary's virginity alone could be joined to motherhood; thirdly, Mary's virginity was figured by the woman clothed with the sun (Apocalypse 12:1), the sun representing Jesus Christ, Mary's Son. Therefore, "the blessed fruit of Mary's womb" miraculously conceived by the Divine Power and the Divine Love, deserves even in His human nature to be called the Son of God. Consequently, the Son of Mary is truly and indeed the Son of God; and since Mary's Son is true God, Mary is clearly entitled to be called the Mother of God.

"And behold thy cousin Elizabeth, she also hath conceived a son in her old age, and this is the sixth month with her that is called barren; because no word shall be impossible with God." Although Mary did not doubt the angel's explanation concerning her becoming the Mother of the Son of God without detriment to her virginity, and had not asked, like Zachary, for a sign in proof of the angel's declaration, nevertheless, partly as a reward for her faith and her submission to God's holy will in choosing her to be the Mother of His divine Son, the long promised and expected Saviour of mankind, a sign was given her, and partly to enable her to share in the very first act in the Redeemer's

mission, the sanctification of His precursor before his very birth. It was indeed befitting that the Saviour's Mother should know her Son's precursor, and follow the divine inspiration to betake herself to Elizabeth and become the medium of his sanctification, and thus inaugurate her future office in the Church as Mediatrix of mankind with her divine Son. The angel after having thus spoken to Mary, awaited in silence her answer and consent to God's choice of her as the Mother of His divine Son, the promised Saviour, who was to wed or assume our human nature, in order to redeem mankind, for such was the object of the angel's mission to Mary. In this all-important matter Mary was under no compulsion or fear, but was perfectly free, for God compels no one against his will. Adam, the ancestor of the human race, by abusing his free-will and disobeying God, had lost for both himself and his posterity, God's grace and friendship and forfeited all rights to eternal happiness. But divine grace and friendship, and heavenly happiness could be recovered only through the proper use of the free-will of her who was the fittest person to bring into the world the "Holy One, the Son of God," to repair the evil consequences of Adam's disobedience and satisfy the offended divine justice. There never had been, nor shall there ever be so important an affair depending on the consent of a creature, as that which awaited Mary's reply and consent. The eternal welfare of the whole human race depended thereon. How anxiously did Gabriel and all the angels of the heavenly court await Mary's reply! And how grateful should we be to her for having in this proved herself the Virgin most prudent and faithful!

"And Mary said: Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it done to me according to thy word." Mary's consent so humbly given deserves our admiration and our gratitude on account of the infinite benefits it has conferred on mankind. Knowing the necessity of her consent for our salvation, she is not

elated by the sublime honor and dignity it would acquire for her, she gives it most humbly, submitting in perfect obedience to the divine decree. And how powerful is Mary's fiat, "Be it done." It is as powerful as, and even more powerful than God's fiat, "let there be," at the creation. When God says *fiat*, it is not a mere word, but an infinite action, for it creates, gives existence to what was not. But Mary's fiat acted not on a creature, but its effect reached God Himself, and caused the Son of God to assume human nature and become man in her chaste womb, and made herself the Mother of the Son of God, of her Creator and Saviour, and enabled the Son of God to begin the work of our Redemption: "AND THE WORD WAS MADE FLESH" (John 1:14). "And the angel departed from her," who had thus become the Mother of the Son of God, and the wonder and admiration of heaven itself, for henceforth no one was or could be so near to God Himself as His Mother!

The Visitation

"The Mother of My Lord" (Luke 1:43)

This mystery is immediately connected with the Annunciation. In each the divine Maternity of Mary is clearly set forth; in the one before, in the other after the Incarnation of the Son of God. In the Annunciation the angel Gabriel, God's messenger, asks Mary's consent to become the Mother of the promised and long expected Messias, the very Son of God; in the Visitation Elizabeth, "filled with the Holy Ghost," praises Mary for having given her consent, and testifies to the sanctification of the Messias precursor at the sound of Mary's greeting, and openly declares her to be "the Mother of my Lord," that is, of God.

"Mary, rising up in those days, went into the hill country with haste into a city of Juda." Mary after the Annunciation

and the Incarnation of the Son of God, is believed to have spent a few days in retirement and thanksgiving. Why did she undertake that journey? First, in obedience to a special divine inspiration, and secondly, on account of her friendship for Elizabeth, and also, out of love and charity, to assist her. It is believed that Mary did not travel by the ordinary roads, but by by-paths, in order to be alone and commune more freely with God. She hastened on her way, to escape notice. In this she serves as a model to young women, who are naturally fond of company and display. How her heart was glowing with divine love during her journey, for she bore with her the very Son of God!

“She entered the house of Zachary and saluted Elizabeth.” Mary, ever humble, saluted first. Her exaltation to the dignity of Mother of the Messias, the Son of God, far from filling her with pride, only rendered her more humble. Saint Bernard observes that humility is far more necessary than virginity, for though the latter is most admirable, yet is not necessary to salvation; whilst humility is so necessary, that no one can be saved without it.

“It came to pass that, when Elizabeth heard Mary’s salutation, the infant leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Ghost. And she cried out with a loud voice, and said: Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb. And whence is this to me, that the Mother of my Lord should come to me? For behold as soon as the voice of thy salutation sounded in my ears, the infant in my womb leaped for joy. And blessed art thou, because thou hast believed, because those things shall be accomplished that were spoken to thee by the Lord.”

Let us now consider one after the other the wonders that took place when the Virgin Mary greeted Elizabeth. In the first place, at the very sound of Mary’s voice the yet unborn

infant precursor leaped for joy, as Elizabeth herself declared. And why did he do this? Because, as the angel had told Zachary, his father, he was sanctified then by the very presence of the unborn Saviour who had assumed human nature in order to save and sanctify mankind. The sanctification of His precursor was the first fruit of His redemption. And how was it effected? Through the Saviour's Mother, the Virgin Mary, "at the sound of her voice." Behold, then, a proof of Mary's share in the redemption! It was Jesus that performed the miracle and sanctified His yet unborn precursor, but this He accomplished through His Mother's instrumentality, through her greeting. In the next place, at the very sound of Mary's voice Elizabeth "was filled with the Holy Ghost," and acquainted by Him of the Incarnation "of the Son of the Most High," of Mary's wonderful divine Maternity and of all that the messenger of God, the angel Gabriel, had said to the Virgin, and under this divine inspiration Elizabeth loudly proclaimed the sublime dignity of Mary by calling her "the Mother of my Lord," that is, "the Mother of my God," and declared her more blessed and more holy than all women, as God's messenger had previously done: "BLESSED ART THOU AMONG WOMEN," adding, at the same time: "AND BLESSED is THE FRUIT OF THY WOMB." Finally, Elizabeth, still "filled with the Holy Ghost," eulogized Mary's faith in all that the angel had said to her, and prophesied to her the fulfillment of all that the Lord had said to her by His angel: "Blessed art thou, because thou hast believed, because those things shall be accomplished, that were spoken to thee by the Lord."

Let us now reflect for a few moments on what we have learned from the Gospel about the Blessed Virgin. The Gospel clearly testifies that it was God Himself who was the first publicly to honor the Blessed Virgin Mary by sending to her His angel to treat with her concerning the Incarnation of His divine Son; the second was the Holy Ghost, the third

Person of the Blessed Trinity, through Saint Elizabeth, whom He enlightened and inspired to proclaim Mary as the "Mother of my Lord," that is, "of my God," and as "the most blessed among women," and as the medium of the Messias in His precursor's sanctification. With these examples of God the Father and of God the Holy Ghost, are not we Catholics not merely perfectly justified but even in duty bound to call Mary and honor her as "the Mother of God"? Did not Mary bear in her chaste womb for nine months the "Holy One," who is "the Son of the Most High," and then bring Him into the world to redeem and save mankind? And may we not justly implore the intercession and assistance of her whom the Holy Ghost, through Saint Elizabeth proclaimed as the channel of grace and salvation? "Whence is this to me," exclaimed Saint Elizabeth, "filled with the Holy Ghost, that the Mother of my Lord should come to me? As soon as the voice of thy salutation sounded in my ears, the infant in my womb leaped for joy." They who refuse to call Mary "the Mother of their Lord" or "blessed among women," or will not honor or invoke her as such, are most assuredly "not filled with the Holy Ghost," or inspired by Him, but by quite a different spirit! However greatly Mary was honored by God, by the Holy Ghost, nevertheless, she is neither proud nor conceited, for she seeks for herself neither honor nor praise, but, like the psalmist, she refers all the glory to God: "Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but to Thy name give glory" (Psalm 113:1). The unborn precursor had exulted at the sound of Mary's voice and at the presence of Him whose precursor he was destined to be, and now Mary also exults and commences her admirable canticle of thanksgiving.

The Magnificat

"My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced in God, my Saviour." Mary, with all her humility, could not deny the truth of the wonderful praise Elizabeth had

bestowed upon her, but she refers all the glory to God, and rejoices (exults) in her Saviour, in her divine Son. How well she teaches us that in God alone, and not in this world's joys and goods can be found real joy and happiness!

“Because He hath regarded the humility (lowliness) of His handmaid.” Mary, far from being elated by her sublime dignity, acknowledges her nothingness before God, for all her gifts and graces are only gratuitous gifts of the Almighty, and, like Saint Paul, she glories in her infirmities and weakness: “I will glory in my infirmities (weakness), that the power of Christ may dwell in me, for when I am weak, then I am powerful.” (1 Corinthians 12:9,10)

“For behold from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed.” These words are a real prophecy, which has ever since been fulfilled in the Catholic Church, whose members all designate and honor Mary as “the Blessed Virgin, the Mother of God.”

“Because He that is mighty hath done great things to me; and holy is His name.” From all eternity God had destined Mary to be the Mother of His divine Son as the Saviour of mankind. She was mentioned by Him in the very beginning of the world, immediately after the fall of our first parents as the woman who should crush the serpent’s head and bring forth Him who would repair the fall and restore to mankind God’s friendship. Later on she was at diverse times announced by numerous prophecies and figures in the Old Testament; to fit her for her sublime dignity, God had preserved her from original sin, endowed her with the fullness of grace, confirmed her in grace, filled her with the Holy Ghost, and made her the Mother of His divine Son without detriment to her virginity. In this manner God raised her to the highest holiness and perfection, made her a relative, so to speak, of the Deity, preserved from corruption

after death her body which had borne the Man-God, assumed her in both body and soul into heaven, exalted her above all the angels and saints, so that God alone is above her, and she is there also as our Advocate, our spiritual Mother, the Mother of mercy, the Refuge of sinners, the Perpetual Help of Christians and the Queen of angels and saints. How great things has not the Almighty done for Mary! How greatly has He honored her. He did not think that He was doing too much to honor the Mother of His Son. We read in the sixth chapter of the Book of Esther that King Assuerus, being reminded how Mordechai had discovered a conspiracy and saved his life, inquired concerning how he should show his gratitude by publicly honoring him, saying: "What ought to be done to the man whom the king is desirous to honor?" The answer he received was this: "The man whom the king desires to honor ought to be clothed with the king's apparel, and to be set upon the horse the king rides upon, and to have the royal crown upon his head, and let the first of the king's princes and nobles hold his horse, and going through the street of the city, proclaim before him and say: thus shall he be honored whom the king hath a mind to honor." (Esther 6:6-9) In like manner, God appoints His priests to call the attention of those who believe in Him to the divine Maternity and holiness of Mary and all the honor He Himself has shown her and confers on her in heaven, and then to say to them: "Thus shall be honored she who is full of grace, blessed among women and the worthy Mother of the Son of God." God, who has done so much for Mary, has done very much for us also, as Mary reminds us.

"His mercy is from generation to generation to them that fear Him." Before Mary the psalmist had sung: "The Lord is sweet to all; and His tender mercies are over (above) all His works" (Psalm 144:9). His mercy is, indeed, boundless. Its extent: its length is eternal; its breadth includes all graces,

all men, all places; its height reaches to the most sublime graces prepared not for the angels only, but even for us, poor sinners; its depth reaches the incomprehensible humiliations of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Son of the Virgin Mary, His wonderful longanimity towards sinners, which knows how to draw good out of evil. The only condition to secure mercy is “to fear God.” Mary’s mercy is likewise, in some manner, boundless; she is a sweet Mother to even the greatest sinners who desire to amend, and obtains for them conversion, the divine forgiveness, perseverance and heaven.

“He hath put down the mighty from their seat,” continues Mary, “and hath exalted the humble; He hath filled the hungry with good things, and hath sent the rich away empty.”

How differently, and yet how justly, does the infinitely good and just God treat the humble and the proud, and the virtuous lowly poor and the wicked rich and worldly great! “God resists the proud and gives grace to the humble” (1 Peter 5:5). In concluding her admirable canticle, Mary, filled with patriotic fervor, praises God’s fidelity to His promises, saying: “He hath received Israel, His servant, being mindful of His mercy, as He spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and his seed forever.” By these words Mary alludes to the Messias, to His Incarnation and also to its first fruit in the sanctification of the Precursor, in fulfillment of the divine promises and prophecies.

“Blessed Is the Fruit of Thy Womb, Jesus”

Jesus is infinitely above and beyond all comparison. Mary, however, exalted, is yet only a creature of God. But Jesus is infinitely more. As to His human nature He is only a creature. He called Himself the Son of man to designate His humanity.

He is also God, because in Him the human nature is inseparably united to the divine nature in only one personality, that of the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity. Jesus is God from all eternity of the substance of the Father; He is Man born in time of the substance of His Mother Mary, made from it and out of it by the creative power and act of the Most Holy Trinity. Between Jesus and Mary there is the most perfect physical relation, for there is no closer physical relation than between mother and child. The angel said to Mary: "Behold thou shalt conceive in thy womb and shalt bring forth a Son, and thou shalt call His name Jesus. . . . The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Most High shall overshadow thee. And therefore also the Holy One that shall be born of thee, shall be called the Son of God." (Luke 1:31,35). And when Elizabeth said to Mary, "Blessed is the fruit of thy womb" (Ibid. 42), the Holy Ghost had already come down upon Mary and the power of the Most High had already overshadowed her, and therefore Mary was already, as Elizabeth declared, "the Mother of my Lord," that is, "of my God," and, consequently, the "Holy One" that was to be born of her, was truly "the Son of God."

Jesus is God, the very Author, Source, Origin and Giver of all blessings. Of His blessings we all and each have a share; of His fullness Mary and we all have received. In Him are all blessings to be found; without Him there is neither nor can be any blessing for any one or in any one. "Of His fullness we all have received." (John 1:16) There is no greater nor better work than the Man-God. "In Him dwells the fullness of the Divinity (Godhead) corporeally" (Colossians 2:9); fullness of grace, the Creator, the Preserver, the Redeemer, the Sanctifier, the absolute Mediator and Intercessor of mankind. His death reconciles us with God, His blood atones for our sins, His resurrection restores our fallen nature, His ascension places Him in His body at the right hand of the Father, and makes His human nature the highest in power

and glory after the Deity. "Thou shalt call His name Jesus," said the angel to Mary (Luke 1:23); the same was said by an angel to Joseph also (Matthew 1:31). And the name Jesus was accordingly bestowed upon Him at His circumcision (Luke 2:21). The name Jesus is an adorable name, because it is above all names, and "there is no other name given to men in which we must be saved, nor is there salvation in any other" (Acts 4:12). "Tasteless to me," says Saint Bernard, "is all spiritual food, if it is not enriched with the oil of this name; insipid, if not flavored with this salt. If thou write, I enjoy it not, except I read Jesus in it; if thou converse, it pleases me not, except I hear Jesus. Jesus is honey in the mouth, melody in the ear, rapture in the heart. It is, moreover, a medicine. If any one is sad, let Jesus enter his heart and thence ascend to his mouth, and lo! at the rising of this light the mists are scattered, and the sunshine appears. Has any one committed a crime, or does he even rush in despair to the halter of death; but if he invokes this name of life, will he not again breathe the breath of life? When I pronounce the name of Jesus, I recall that humble Man, meek of heart, full of kindness, sober, chaste, merciful, in a word, the Man adorned with all virtues and, at the same time, the almighty God, from whom I expect all the assistance I need for my salvation. Let us then adore and reverence this name, which dissipates the fumes of pride, tempers the thirst of avarice, extinguishes the flames of lust, restrains the impetuosity of anger, heals the wounds of jealousy, the name, in short, which will save those who pronounce it."

"Wherefore, God also hath exalted Him and hath given Him a name, which is above all names, that, at the name of Jesus every knee should bend of all who are in heaven, on earth and under the earth, and every tongue should confess that the Lord Jesus is in the glory of the Father." (Philippians 2:8-10)

The Name of Jesus

- “The name of Jesus,” says Saint Bernardine of Siena, “is a short word, but very comprehensive and full of mysteries.” It means Saviour, Redeemer. Hence it is a most holy name, the name of the Son of God. It comes from heaven, from God Himself, for the angel Gabriel, God’s messenger, said to Mary: “Thou shalt call His name Jesus.” (Luke 1:31) And the angel who appeared to Joseph, said to him: “Thou shalt call His name Jesus, for He shall save His people from their sins.” (Matthew 1:21) Hence there is no name greater or more holy than the name of Jesus on account of its meaning and of Him who bears it, the very Son of God.
- There is no name more powerful. “God hath given Him a name which is above all names, that in the name of Jesus every knee should bend, of those who are in Heaven, on earth and under the earth” (Philippians 2:9,10). “The name of Jesus,” says Origen, “has, indeed, great power against devils, even when invoked by sinful men.” Christ, before ascending to heaven, gave to His apostles the power to cast out devils and perform other miracles in His name (Mark 16:17). The first miracle performed by the apostles was performed by Saint Peter “in the name of Jesus of Nazareth” (Acts 3:6). To the devil Saint Paul said one day: “I command thee in the name of Jesus Christ to go out from her. And he went out at the same hour” (Acts 10:18). “The name of Jesus,” says Saint Vincent Ferrer, “is a means of overcoming all dangers.”
- The name of Jesus is a name of sweetness and consolation, as is experienced by all who devoutly pronounce it. “He who does not experience sweetness in pronouncing the name of Jesus,” says Saint Bernard, “is either spiritually dead or steeped in tepidity.”

- The name of Jesus is deserving of our veneration and love. “In the name of Jesus,” says Saint Paul, “every knee should bend” (Philippians 2:9). It is, moreover, the name of Him, who for the love of us became man and died on the cross to save us, poor, ungrateful sinners. How much should we love it and with how great fervor should we invoke it! “Are you sick,” says Saint Laurence Justinian, “in suffering, or assailed by blasphemous thoughts or despair, or disturbed by fear, anxiety, perplexity; or are you in solitude, traveling, in danger on land or on sea, wherever you are, invoke the holy name of Jesus, not merely with your lips, but from your inmost heart,” In fact, what a magnificent promise has Jesus made to those who pray in His name! “Amen, amen I say to you: if you ask the Father anything in My name, He will give it you.” (John 16:23)

Let us often salute, with Saint Francis de Sales, the Holy Name of Jesus: ” O divine, glorious and powerful name! Impress thyself in our souls, and be inscribed thereon, so that through thee they may be worthy of salvation.”

The name of Jesus is -

- A divine name, for it could come only from God Himself, and it can be pronounced with merit, only through divine grace. “No one can say, Lord Jesus, but by the Holy Ghost.” (1 Corinthians 12:3)
- A name deserving of veneration: “In the name of Jesus every knee should bend.” (Philippians 2:10)
- A sacred name: “In the name of Jesus they shall cast out devils.” (Mark 16:17)
- A name imparting strength: “In the name of Jesus of Nazareth, arise and walk.” (Acts 3:6)

- A salutary name: “Having heard these things, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.” (Acts 19:5)
- An almighty name: “Amen, amen I say unto you, whatsoever you shall ask the Father in My name, He will give it to you.” (John 16:23)
- A glorious name: “This man is to Me a vessel of election to carry My name before the Gentiles.” (Acts 9:15)
- An honorable name: “They went rejoicing that they were accounted worthy to suffer reproach for the name of Jesus.” (Acts 5:41)
- An incomparable name: “There is no other name under heaven given to men, whereby we must be saved.” (Acts 4:12)

Holy Mary

God is infinitely holy. The angels, in awe before Him, constantly honor and adore Him, chanting: “Holy, holy, holy, Lord God of hosts.” A spotless holiness is required to be admitted to the vision and enjoyment of God in heaven. The holier the saint, the holier the angel, the nearer he approaches the throne of God. Of all creatures Mary is the holiest, because God, having destined her as the Mother of His divine Son, sanctified her in a unique manner, that she might be a fit dwelling for the Incarnate Word: “The Most High hath sanctified His own tabernacle.” (Psalm 45:5) Mary is the Mother of God, and therefore must the most closely resemble her divine Son, that she might be fit and worthy to be His Mother.

Mary, therefore, was endowed and adorned with all the virtues and with the gifts of the Holy Ghost in a supreme and heroic degree; from the very first moment of her existence,

she surpassed in holiness all the angels and saints combined. God bestowed on her at every moment of her life an abundance of divine grace, and she every moment increased in holiness by her most faithful co-operation with every grace. Hence she was always full of grace and, at the same time, increased every moment in grace and merits, and her capacity for grace constantly increased at the same time in the same proportion.

Moreover, Mary never contracted the least stain of sin, not even the stain of original sin. Of her the Holy Ghost says: "My perfect one is but one." (Canticle 6:8) "Thou art all fair, O my love, and there is not a spot in thee." (Canticle 4:7) Mary was preserved from original sin and from all actual sin through the merits of her divine Son, our Saviour. She was, indeed, redeemed by Him, but in a more noble manner than the rest of mankind; for she who was to "crush the serpent's head" (Genesis 3:15), never was nor should be in the serpent's power, for by the merits of her divine Son, she was preserved from contracting original sin and confirmed in grace. As Mother of God she should enjoy privileges and favors bestowed on no one else, and this besides receiving every spiritual favor ever conferred on a creature, human or angelic. To her are evidently applied the following texts of Holy Scripture: "I, the Lord, have called thee in justice and taken thee by the hand and preserved thee" from original sin (Isaiah 42:6); "Nothing defiled comes into her, for she is the brightness of the eternal light and the unspotted mirror" (Wisdom 7:25,26). God loved, honored, respected and esteemed her at the very beginning of her life, for already then she was destined to be the Mother of the Son of God, and was, therefore, already endowed with a super-eminent degree of sanctifying grace, superior to that of all creatures combined. She could say with Saint Paul, but with greater reason: "By the grace of God I am what I am; His grace was not void in me." (1 Corinthians 15:10). From the very first

moment of her existence she was a “partaker of the divine nature” (2 Peter 1:4), and a worthy “heir of God” (Romans 8:17).

But all her gifts, all her beauty, were all within: “All the glory of the King’s daughter is within.” (Psalm 44:14) Unlike the apostles and apostolic men, she lived in humble retirement and performed no miracles, nor engaged in conspicuous and glorious deeds, but led apparently but an ordinary good and virtuous life, discharging her domestic duties. Most profound and sincere was her humility, as we have seen above. Next to the humility of the Saviour, her divine Son, was the humility of His Mother. It was unsurpassed, unequaled by any creature, just as her holiness is unequaled by any creature. The Church chants of her: “By her virginity Mary pleased God, but by her humility, she conceived the Son of God.” This means that although Mary’s virginity was very pleasing to God, yet God chose her to be the Mother of His Son on account of her unparalleled humility, for such a humility was a proof of her unparalleled holiness, which fitted her to be the Mother of the Saviour of man kind. The more humble a person is, the more holy also is that person, for one’s holiness is in proportion to his humility. Mary’s very vow of virginity proves her incomparable humility, for she showed thereby that she had not the ambition then shared by all the other daughters of Juda, of becoming the Mother of the long expected Messias; she, in fact, felt convinced that she was too unworthy of such a great dignity. She rather desired to be the servant, the very slave of the happy woman who should be chosen as the Mother of the “Desired of nations.” Behold her at the Annunciation. How she is troubled at the words of praise addressed to her by the angel, for even the least praise of her was painful to her great humility. But how this painful feeling was still more increased when she learned that she was the chosen one. Nothing but the express will of God could have prevailed

upon her to consent to be invested with so sublime a dignity. Moreover, how beautifully does her humility shine forth in giving her consent, for she calls herself a mere servant of God: "Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it done to me according to thy word."

At the Visitation also her humility shines forth. She is now the Mother of the promised Saviour of mankind, and yet she hastens to the assistance of her cousin, Saint Elizabeth, ready to perform for her the most menial services. At her arrival she salutes Elizabeth first. And when Elizabeth, inspired by the Holy Ghost, breaks forth in praises and congratulations to her, and loudly proclaims the wonderful effects that followed the sound of Mary's salutation, Mary accepts nothing of all this for herself, but refers all the honor and glory to God, saying: "My soul doth magnify the Lord . . . because He hath regarded the lowliness of His handmaid."

We have another most beautiful example of her great humility in her Purification, in which she renounced, so to speak, what every one holds as his most precious good in this world, her honor. She, the spotless Virgin, appeared in this legal ceremony prescribed for ordinary mothers, not as the purest of virgins that she was, but merely as an ordinary mother. "Grace," says Saint Augustine, "had raised Mary above the Old Law, but her humility placed her under it." There never has been nor shall be in any creature so great and heroic a humility as Mary's, and therefore there never has been nor shall be in any creature so great a holiness as Mary's. Therefore it is meet and just to address Mary with the title given her by the Church of "Holy Mary."

The Name of Mary

"The name of the virgin was Mary." (Luke 1:27) This humble, obscure virgin, chosen by God to be the Mother of His divine

Son, the Saviour of mankind, uttered a remarkable prophecy: "Behold from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed" (Ibid. 48). This prophecy has ever since been literally fulfilled, for her most usual appellation is "the Blessed Virgin." Her name is universally revered, honored and invoked throughout the Church of Jesus Christ, for -

1. It is a *holy name*, next in holiness to that of Jesus. It is the name of the most holy of creatures, of her who is the purest, the most virtuous and full of merits. "Mary's name," says Saint Peter Chrysologus, "recalls all that is pure and chaste. She was the first to consecrate her virginity to God. No one has been more generous and self-sacrificing, or loved God and the neighbor more than she. She is the summary or compendium of holiness."
2. The name of Mary is a glorious name, for no other name was so great in ancient times. Eve, Sara, Judith, Esther were but weak figures of Mary, the spiritual Mother of mankind and the true Mother of our divine Saviour, the Son of God, for she who is the Mother of God, is endowed with the most sublime of dignities and is entitled to be the Queen of heaven and earth.
3. It is a powerful name, for it is the name of her who "crushed the serpent's head" and is, therefore, the terror of hell. Her Immaculate Conception broke the power of Satan over man kind, and, therefore, was the forerunner of the death of Jesus Christ which deprived Satan of his power over fallen man. It is the name of her who is omnipotent by her prayer, for she is the Mother of God. To please His Mother, Jesus Christ, the most dutiful of sons, anticipated the time for working miracles. God who has promised to hear the prayer of a repentant sinner, cannot refuse to hear the prayers of His Mother, whom He honors and loves more than a son can love his mother. The proofs of Mary's boundless

influence with her divine Son are visible not only in the wonders of Lourdes, Loreto and many other places of pilgrimage in her honor, but also in the holy and chaste life of the religious, of the Catholic clergy and of her devoted clients.

4. The name of Mary is a sweet name. To good children their mother's name is sweet. By Christ's last will Mary is our Mother also. She is the most loving, tender and compassionate of mothers toward all her spiritual children, for at what price did she become our spiritual mother? For this she had to undergo the most painful interior agony in seeing her Son and her God dying the most cruel and ignominious death for us, whom her Son entrusted to her as her spiritual children. There never was a sorrow like unto her sorrow, when she became our spiritual Mother. A good mother feels greater love and compassion for the children who have caused her most pain, or who are the most helpless. Hence she is the most loving of mothers, and her name should be sweet to us, and we should go to her with the simplicity and confidence of little children in all our trials, sufferings, dangers and temptations for her help and protection.

5. To him who frequently and devoutly pronounces her holy name, and especially often says the Hail Mary, her name invoked at the hour of his death will prove a great consolation and a protection against all temptations in that terrible hour on which depends his eternal destiny, for she who "crushed the serpent's head" "will help him to overcome Satan's last assaults and obtain for him a judgment of mercy from her divine Son.

Holy Mary, Mother of God

Had it been given to you to choose your own mother, and to endow her from her very birth with all the gifts, good qualities and attainments you could think of, what would you have made her? You would most assuredly have made her what you would consider as the paragon of perfection. But Mary is the Mother of God, for the angel sent by God said to her: "The Holy One that shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God" (Luke 1:35); and Saint "Elizabeth, filled with the Holy Ghost," called her "the Mother of my Lord," that is, "of my God." If God Him self through His angel and through Saint Elizabeth, called Mary "the Mother of God," it is both our right and our duty to call and invoke her as "the Mother of God." The psalmist represents God the Father saying to the Messias: "Thou art My Son; this day have I begotten Thee" (Psalm 109). At the baptism of Christ the heavens opened, and the voice of the heavenly Father was heard saying: "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (Luke 3:22); and at Christ's Transfiguration on Mount Thabor, the heavenly Father again said: "This is My beloved Son in whom I am well pleased" (Matthew 17:5). But the SAME JESUS, whom the Father declares to be "His own beloved Son," is also the SON OF MARY. Hence she can truly say of Him: "He whom the heavenly Father calls His own beloved Son, is also truly my Son, and I alone of all creatures can say to Him: Jesus, Thou art both my Son and my God." Mary is the nearest relative of Jesus, because she is His Mother and has given birth to Him. Hence Saint Peter Damian says: "The Son of God dwelt in Mary, and therefore has an identity of substance with her." To Mary alone can the Son of God say: "Thou art My Mother, and I am thy Son." The Venerable Bede says: "The very Son of God, conceived in the Virgin's womb, drew His flesh from her flesh, for He could not be a man, unless He had a human origin." To become our Saviour, the Son of God had to become man and have a human origin; and from all eternity Mary had been destined

to be His Mother. Therefore, Mary is truly the Mother of God and deserves this name by the right of maternity.

Mary, then, is exalted above all creatures. The dignity of Mother of God is the greatest, the most sublime dignity that can be conferred on a creature. "God," says Saint Bonaventure, "can create millions of worlds greater and more perfect than this one; but He cannot create a dignity greater or more perfect than the Divine Maternity." "The divine Maternity," says Pope Pius IX, "is the crown of all the wonders of God." But she whom God chose to be His own Mother, must have been made by Him such as to be worthy of His respect and love immeasurably above every other creature. The Mother of God should, then, be more pure and more holy than any other creature, and, in fact, should be next to God Himself in purity and holiness, and should be such as to reflect honor on God Himself for having her as His Mother. But let us bear in mind that God, the infinite Wisdom, does not, as we do, regard or place stress on mere corporeal or physical beauty, earthly riches, fine garments, intellectual attainments, popularity, influence or high station in life, for all these things are but as vile dust in comparison with virtue, innocence, holiness and moral beauty and worth. These virtues and spiritual qualities, and these only count with God and draw His love and respect. Moreover the Mother of God could not deserve the respect, love and veneration of angels and men required by her sublime dignity, were she stained with slight faults or failings or subject to any moral weakness. Therefore, it behooves that the Mother of God should be preserved from every stain of sin or fault even from the very first moment of her life, and, besides, be confirmed in grace and free from all sin during her whole life, and, moreover, be endowed with the highest degree of grace, or, as the angel expressed it in his greeting, should always be "full of grace," according to her capacity. Were it otherwise, the contempt and

astonishment resulting from any moral weakness or imperfection on her part, would redound to the injury and dishonor of God Himself, for not honoring His Mother, as her intimate relation to Himself required. From this it follows also that they who willfully belittle the Mother of God and refuse to give her the honor due to her dignity and intimate relation to God, the honor taught us by God's example, such persons necessarily displease and dishonor God Himself.

The Son of God, as the Son of Mary, was, with out doubt, the best, the most dutiful of sons, for He was on earth our Model in all the virtues. Therefore, no son ever honored or loved his mother as much and as perfectly as Jesus honored and loved His Mother Mary. A dutiful son is greatly pleased and rejoices to see his good mother universally respected and esteemed, for he considers her interests and her welfare as his own, and does all he can to promote them, since the honor shown to his mother redounds to his own honor. In like manner, Jesus Christ, the Son of God and Son of Mary, is pleased to see all who believe in Him, revering, honoring and confiding in His Mother, and considers it all as done to Himself. Does He not say: "Whatever you have done to the least of Mine, you have done it unto Me?" (Matthew 25:40). Is not Mary incomparably more to Jesus, her Son, than "the least" of His disciples? He surely not only is pleased to see His Mother honored as her sublime dignity requires, but expressly wills us to give due honor to her. And since He considers the honor we give her as given to Himself, and since He is our Model in all things, we should consider Him as prescribing the honor He Himself paid to her as the model of the honor we owe her. Hence we may here apply to Mary the question of King Assuerus: "What ought to be done to the man whom the king is desirous to honor?" (Esther 6:6) "What honor should we pay to her whom the Son of God wishes to honor?"

The Protestant, as such, replies: "No honor at all, for to honor her would derogate from the honor due to God, and be a kind of idolatry!" But what answer does the Catholic Church give to this question? The Catholic Church answers it by fulfilling Mary's own prophecy: "Behold from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed, because He that is mighty hath done great things to me." (Luke 1:48) The Popes, the bishops, the doctors, the saints and the faithful of the Church have ever since the day on which the Holy Ghost descended upon the apostles in the form of fiery tongues, and enabled them to found the Church, vied with one another in honoring her whom God Himself had called "blessed," and have given her as her principal titles, "The Blessed Virgin, the Mother of God." In her honor the Catholic Church has instituted feasts, erected churches and altars, made use of the finest productions of art in painting, sculpture, architecture, music; Mary is honored in the Divine Office, in numerous prayers and devotions, in her shrines, by pilgrimages, sermons, learned works, sodalities, the wearing of scapulars, medals, the recitation of the Angelus, of the Rosary, and other prayers; her name is invoked next to that of Jesus, with faith, confidence and love, in both spiritual and temporal wants, by the good, by sinners for the grace of conversion, by the sick, the afflicted, the dying, and all this with wonderful results, so that numerous are the beautiful titles given her in gratitude for favors received through her powerful intercession. And what is more, countless are those who strive to imitate her virtues and consecrate their virginity like her to God and devote their whole life to the service of the poor, the sick, the forsaken, to the relief of all the ills by which poor human nature is afflicted. And this does not derogate from the honor and love we owe to our Divine Saviour; on the contrary, experience proves that they who love and honor Mary the most, are the very ones who also love and honor Jesus Christ the most. Moreover, however much we may honor Mary, we can never honor her

as much as God Himself has honored her. Hence of the honor we pay to Mary we may say: "This honor is she worthy of, whom the Lord of heaven and earth has deemed worthy to choose as the Mother of His Divine Son!"

Pray for Us Sinners

"I believe in the Communion of Saints." This is an article of the Apostles Creed, which every Christian is bound to believe. All who have been baptized have been incorporated in the same family, the Church of Jesus Christ, of which God is the Father, and they are all brethren in Jesus Christ, members of the same body, of which Jesus Christ is the Head. As there is but "one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all" (Ephesians 4:5,6), and Christ instituted baptism in and for His Church, all who are validly baptized become thereby members of the Church, Christ's mystical body, and remain so until by some willful act they renounce the faith of the Church. Wherefore the Communion of Saints includes not only the members of the Church on earth, but also all the souls departed who are in heaven or in purgatory. They have the same Father in heaven, God; the same Mother, the Church; and heaven is either already, or is destined to be their permanent home with their heavenly Father; and they are united together as forming one family, as being members of one and the same body, of which Christ is the Head (Colossians 1:18). They are divided into three classes. The first class is called the Church Triumphant; its members are already in heaven enjoying their victory, their triumph over every obstacle; the second class is called the Church Suffering, for its members are suffering in purgatory until they have done penance for the light sins which they had not sufficiently atoned for, when death removed them from this world. To the third class belong all the members of the Catholic Church who are yet living in this world. It is called the Church Militant, because all its

members have to combat and conquer the temptations of the devil, the allurements of the world and also their own evil inclinations and passions. Their life is a constant warfare. All these three classes are united in one family, as members of one and the same body, and mutually help and care for one another, just as the members of our body do for one another. The members of the Church Triumphant, having already reached the happy home of their Father, stand in no need of help, but are most willing to help the members of the other two classes, and they are able to do so, because, being the friends and beloved children of God, they possess influence over Him, and He takes delight in pleasing them by granting all they ask for in favor of their fellow-members in need. The members of the Church Suffering, being unable to help themselves, are helped by their other fellow members in heaven and on earth. As to the members of the Church Militant, they are able to assist their fellow-members both on earth and in purgatory by different means, and especially by their prayers. But as they are constantly engaged in combating their enemies and often in danger of being overcome, they need the help of the members of the Church Triumphant, and therefore invoke them in their needs with confidence, for they know that the saints in heaven, being now secure of their own salvation, are also solicitous for the salvation of their fellow-members on earth, and that they will obtain for them the needed assistance from God, who refuses nothing to the prayers of His elect. Such is the teaching of Holy Scripture, such the teaching of the Church of Jesus Christ. "We, being many," says Saint Paul, "are one body in Christ, and every one members of one another." (Romans 12:5) "We are members of one another." (Ephesians 4:25) "My servant Job shall pray for you; his face will I accept. . . . The Lord accepted the face of Job, when he prayed for his friends." (Job 42:8,10) The saints and angels in heaven take great interest in us who are on earth, for, says our divine Saviour, "I say to you that there shall be joy

in heaven upon one sinner that doth penance, more than upon ninety-nine just who need not penance." (Luke 15:7) Judas Machabeus, the great Jewish patriot, related to his little army the vision he had seen: "Onias, who had been high-priest, a good and virtuous man, holding up his hands, prayed for all the people of the Jews. After this there appeared also another man, admirable for age and glory, environed with great beauty and majesty. Then Onias said: "This is a lover of his people and of the people of Israel; this is he that prays much for the people, and for all the holy city, Jeremias, the prophet of God." (2 Machabees 15:12-14)

The saints in heaven remember that they once formed a part of the Church Militant, that they had then to struggle long and hard against the world, the devil and their own passions in order to gain heaven. They are now in heaven the intimate friends of God, sharing His own happiness and very much honored and loved by Him; hence they have great influence with Him and know that He will not refuse to grant them all they ask of Him. They are, moreover, zealous for His glory and long to see Him loved and faithfully served by all men. They also take a deep interest in their fellow-men on earth, in the souls re deemeed by the sufferings and death of the Son of God, and ardently desire to see all men saved and become their happy companions in heaven. They rejoice very much as Jesus Christ Himself declares, when a sinner on earth does penance. Therefore the saints in heaven are always ready to help us by their prayers, as the high-priest Onias and the prophet Jeremias prayed for the Israelites in their need. They pray especially for those who call upon them for help; and God will surely honor His saints by granting them what ever they pray for, since lie has promised to grant even to us, sinners, whatsoever we ask for in the name of Jesus Christ.

But no one in heaven is more willing to pray for us than Mary, the Mother of God, and our own spiritual Mother also. She is more desirous than all the saints and angels to see God loved and served by all men, to see all men saved for whom her divine Son suffered and died. Moreover, she possesses greater influence and power with God than all the saints and angels combined. The saints are only God's servants and friends; but Mary is the Mother of God, and God cannot refuse the prayers of His Mother. Therefore, we have every reason to confide in her prayers for us. We have in the Gospel a beautiful example of Mary's willingness to help those in need, and of her power and influence with her divine Son.

The Marriage at Cana in Galilee

Every act of Jesus Christ on earth had a definite purpose determined upon by God from all eternity. The object or purpose of His first miracle was not merely to come to the relief of the married couple, and gain the confidence of His first disciples, but chiefly to manifest His Mother's kind heart and her so great influence over Him, that He could not refuse to gratify her wishes. This will easily be seen by duly reflecting on the Gospel narrative.

"There was a marriage in Cana of Galilee; and the Mother of Jesus was there. And Jesus also was invited with His disciples. And the wine failing, the Mother of Jesus saith to Him: They have no wine. And Jesus saith to her: Woman, what is that to Me and to thee? My hour is not yet come. His Mother saith to the waiters: Whatsoever He shall say to you, do ye. Now there wet set there six water pots of stone, according to the manner of the purifying of the Jews, containing two or three measures apiece. Jesus saith to them: Fill the water pots with water. And they filled them up to the brim. And Jesus saith to them: Draw out now, and

carry to the chief steward of the feast. And they carried it. And when the chief steward had tasted the water made wine, and knew not whence it was, but the waiters knew, who had drawn the water; the chief steward calls the bridegroom, and saith to him: Every man at first sets forth good wine, and when men have well drunk, then that which is worse. But thou hast kept the good wine until now. This beginning of miracles did Jesus in Cana of Galilee, and manifested His glory, and His disciples believed in Him.” (Luke 2:1-11)

Jesus had just commenced His public ministry and had already gathered a few disciples. He had not yet begun to preach or work miracles, and behold His Mother again appears on the scene in the Gospel, and this time as Intercessor, as Mediatress with her divine Son, of those in need, for she calls His attention to the lack of wine. But Jesus seems to repulse her, to be unwilling to accede to her wishes. But, in fact, it was no repulse or refusal on His part, for He calls her “woman,” a title of honor in the language of the country, equivalent to our word “lady.” Remember that now He appeared before men, not as an ordinary man, but in His official capacity, as the promised Messias, the Saviour of mankind, and therefore considered not relationship or friendship or countrymen, but only the souls of men, just as He had at the age of twelve, attended, as He said, “to His Father’s business.” Hence the honorable title He gives to Mary, instead of calling her “Mother”; nevertheless, He is ready to show clearly to mankind how great Mary’s influence is over Him in all that concerns His ministry, in all that concerns the salvation of men. He tells her, indeed, “My hour hath not yet come”; and this was true, for, as He had not yet begun to preach in public, it was not yet time for Him to work miracles to prove the truth of His preaching, of His mission. But then why did Jesus fulfill His Mother’s wish? If it was not to prove His mission, as we have just seen, it must

have been chiefly to show the great influence His Mother possessed over Him, and that she could obtain from Him all she asked, even if she asked for miracles. The sequel proves not only this, but also that Mary felt certain that He would grant all she asked. Hence she told the waiters to get their orders from Jesus; and you know the result from the Gospel narrative. God is the source of all graces, of all favors, and Mary is the ordinary channel through whom we receive them. Just as God gave us our Saviour through Mary, so also God gives us the fruits of the Saviour's Redemption through Mary. Therefore Mary's loving and tender benevolence shown at Cana towards the married couple, is continued in heaven, where she reigns over all the saints and angels, and is honored by God far above them all, in favor of all who invoke her with confidence, and always with success. Hence let us always have recourse to Mary, the Mother of Jesus and our Mother also, in all our wants and we shall experience the effects of her love for us and of her boundless power with God.

We are all sinners; we have all been conceived in sin; we are naturally more inclined to evil than to good. How many sins have we not committed in thought, word, deed and omission! Every day we fall into sin more or less often. Even our holiest actions are full of imperfections, due to the want of attention or of a pure intention, performed, contaminated by carelessness, selfishness, vanity, pride, self-love. Are we not often beset with temptations and even yield to them? In fact, were it not for God's grace, there is no sin, no crime, however heinous, which we are not capable of committing. Such being our misery, our weakness, our daily, nay, hourly wants and our own helplessness, we, the adopted children of the Mother of God, should earnestly implore her help, her prayers to obtain for us the forgiveness of the sins we have committed, and the grace to keep from sin. And, if Job's prayers to God for the forgiveness of the sins of his friends

were granted, how much more effective are not the prayers of Mary to her divine Son for the forgiveness of our sins! Saint Ephrem thus addresses Mary: " Hail thou, firm security of Christians! Hail thou, help of sinners! Hail thou, salvation of the world!" Her prayers for the sinners who invoke her assistance, are so powerful with God, that the Church calls her: "Mother of mercy" and "Refuge of sinners."

Now

We need divine grace at every moment. And as we need it now, we have recourse to Mary's prayers at this moment to obtain it for us. We are liable, at every moment, to be assailed by the world, the devil and our passions, and to need the help of divine grace to conquer them; we are also in constant need of grace to practise virtue, to make progress therein, to gain merit for heaven. Therefore, it is well for us to have recourse "now" to Mary, the channel of divine grace, to pray for us that we may obtain the grace we need "now" for our salvation.

And at the Hour of Our Death

If there is a time when the help and prayers of our sweet Mother are indispensable to us, it is the terrible hour of our death, that hour on which our eternal lot depends.

It was sin that brought death into the world, for after Adam's sin God said to him: "Thou art dust, and into the dust shalt thou return." (Genesis 3:19) Such is the result of the entrance of sin into the world, and therefore "there is no man that lives always, or that hopes for this" (Eccles. 9:4). We are here on earth to know, love and serve God, and after this life to share for all eternity God's happiness in heaven. If we faithfully love and serve God on earth, after our death the everlasting happiness of heaven shall be ours. But if we

neglect to learn to know God and to love and serve Him in this life, we shall after death be condemned to endless punishment and misery. Hence in this life we are traveling on the road either to an eternity of happiness or to an eternity of woe. "Every man," says Holy Scripture, "shall go into the house of his eternity" (Eccles. 12. 5). Death is the hour on which each man's eternity depends. If at that hour we are in the state of grace, free from grievous sin and in the friendship of God, our lot in eternity will be a happy one. But if we are then burdened with an unrepented, unforgiven grievous sin, and therefore in the enmity of God, we shall be doomed to everlasting punishment.

But although death is certain, the time of our death is unknown to us, and therefore, uncertain. It shall come when we least expect it, "and come," as Saint Paul says, "like a thief in the night" (1 Thessalonians 5:2). It will come suddenly "like lightning/ says our divine Saviour (Matthew 24:27). It will come sooner than we expect. "Remember," says Holy Scripture, "that death is not slow" (Eccli. 14. 12). We should, therefore, be always prepared to meet it.

We know not where we shall die. Will death overtake us at home, in the street, at our place of work or business, among friends or among strangers, in church, on land, or on the sea? All this is unknown to us. We know not how we shall die, whether a natural or a violent death. But the most terrible uncertainty about our death is that we know not whether, when death will carry us off, we shall be in the state of grace, or in the state of sin; whether our death will be the death of the just or the death of the unrepentant sinner; we know not whether our last act will be a holy one, a prayer, or a grievous sin, whether death will overtake us in the commission of grievous sin! What a terrible uncertainty! What usually happens, is that he who leads a good, virtuous life, usually dies a holy death, and that he who leads a life of

sin, usually dies in his sin! As life is, so also is death! "In whatever place the tree shall fall," says the Holy Ghost, "there shall it be" (Eccles. 11:3). "In whatever state we shall be at the hour of death," says Saint Augustine, "in that state we shall remain forever." How terrible for the sinner! And what is still more terrible is that there can be no remedy for a bad death, for we can die but once. Other misfortunes may be repaired or may have some compensation, but a bad death never can, for its evil effects are eternal!

Let us bear in mind that the hour will come, and that it is not far off, when our eyes shall no longer see, our ears no longer hear, our tongue no longer speak, our hands and feet no longer move, our lungs no longer breathe, our heart no longer beat, and when our body enclosed in a coffin shall be buried and gradually corrupt and fall into dust. In the meantime our soul shall have left this world and all that was dear to us, and been judged by Jesus Christ, and sent into the house of her eternity, either to heaven to enjoy its ineffable happiness as the due reward of her good works, or to hell with its endless torments and misery as the due punishment of her unrepented sins.

Wherefore, since our eternal lot depends on the hour of our death, we need then our Mother's special and all-powerful assistance and protection to die a good death; and this is the reason why whenever we recite the Hail Mary, we conclude it by imploring her prayers for us at that all-important moment, on which our eternal salvation depends. If we frequently and fervently recite this beautiful prayer, we may be sure that Mary will not let us die in the enmity of God, but will assuredly pray her divine Son to give us the grace of dying a holy death.

Mary, The Help of the Dying

(from Bronchain's *Meditations*)

Why should we prepare for death under Mary's protection? Because she stood at the foot of the cross, on which Jesus was dying. From that time she received the mission of assisting in their last moments the dying who implore her help. In fact, is it not reasonable, that the Mother of our divine Head and Master should assist His members and disciples also when they are dying? Should not she who became on Calvary our spiritual Mother, also bring us forth to glory on our death-bed? Since she co-operated with Jesus in opening heaven to us, is it not be fitting that she should introduce us into it after our death through her prayers and the infinite merits of her divine Son? Moreover, who is better fitted than a mother to prepare her children for their last journey? And what mother can equal Mary in watchfulness, compassion and mercy? The Church deservedly calls her "Refuge of sinners." And if she delights in daily obtaining our forgiveness from God, how much more will she not be disposed to do so, when we are about to leave this world and appear before the formidable tribunal of our Judge? Let us then daily implore her assistance for that decisive moment, and she will obtain for us perfect contrition and the grace of receiving with humble confidence the forgiveness of our sins. She will then facilitate for us the worthy reception of the Holy Viaticum and Extreme Unction, so that we may be fore-armed against the temptations and anguish of our last moments.

How should we prepare for death with Mary's assistance? Since we may be carried off by a sudden death, without previous illness or warning, we should now, without delay, set our conscience in order and keep it in order and make every month a special preparation for death. This we should do by uniting ourselves to the Mother of God in spirit and prostrating ourselves in spirit at the feet of Jesus crucified,

and cast a glance at our past life and its shortcomings, in order to excite contrition for our many sins; having done this, we should go to confession, as if it were for the last time. Then let us place ourselves under the safeguard of our Saviour and His loving Mother, and unreservedly surrender ourselves to God's infinite mercy.

And if we wish that the moment of death, so terrifying to worldlings, should not prove too painful to us, let us now already do with merit what we shall have to do either willingly or unwillingly when death actually comes to us, that is, let us now already detach ourselves from every creature, and from this very day quit with mind and heart all that death will one day ravish from us. How bitter is it not to be torn away from this world in which all one's affections are centered! On the other hand, how sweet will it be for us to leave this world, if, under Mary's protection, we have already been detached from it during life!

Let us constantly, with Mary's assistance, so live, that our last moment may be the happiest of our mortal life.

"Precious in the sight of God," says Holy Scripture, "is the death of His saints." (Psalm 115:15) Why? Because they are saints. We should, therefore, strive with all our might every day to become holy, and even at every moment of the day, for when death shall knock at our door, it will be too late to begin that arduous work. Our sanctification requires us to avoid carefully every willful fault, punctually and faithfully to perform every duty and obligation of our state of life. This, however, is the task, the work of a life-time, and not an affair to be deferred to and attended to at our last moments, for our divine Saviour tells us: "Be ye ready, because at what hour you know not the Son of man will come" (Matthew 24:44). Blessed is he who will then be well prepared.

Wherefore, it behooves us to be always engaged in overcoming our evil inclinations and passions, and all

temptations, in avoiding whatever is sinful and dangerous, in a word, in leading a true Christian life; and to do all this with the help of our Mother Mary added to our earnest efforts, will be comparatively easy, and will enable us to die a good and holy death. Will not such a death be the harbinger of an eternity of bliss? Is not the happiness of a peaceful death with the sure hope of an endless reward worth all the restraints and sacrifices requisite to give up sin and renounce the dangerous pleasures of the world? And, moreover, let us not forget that such a life, however austere in appearance, has its sweetness, joys, peace and satisfaction not to be found in the goods and pleasures of the world. For the faithful servants of Jesus, and of herself, our loving Mother Mary knows how to change all bitterness into sweetness, especially at the hour of death.

Amen

This word means “let it be so,” and is a re-affirmation and a brief repetition of all that precedes it, namely, of the salutation and praises of Mary, and of the invocation addressed to her of praying for us now and at the hour of our death.

Let us conclude this explanation of the Hail Mary with the words of Saint Augustine: “When I shall have said all I can of thee, O Mary, my praise will fall far short of thy deserts.”

About This EBook

The text of this ebook was taken from the book *The Mother of My Lord, or An Explanation of the Hail Mary*, by Father Ferreol Girardy, C.Ss.R., published in 1916. It has the Imprimatur of Cardinal John Joseph Glennon, Archdiocese of Saint Louis, Missouri, 7 December 1915.

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